



The Honorable Matthew G. Olsen, Director NCTC, Remarks at the Brookings Institution

**BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
THE HONORABLE MATTHEW G. OLSEN
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER**

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Remarks as Prepared Introduction

This past May, a man walked into a Jewish Museum in Belgium and opened fire, killing four. The suspect, a 29-year old French-national, had recently returned from Syria, where he fought alongside the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

The next day, a 22-year old American from Florida blew himself up while detonating a massive truck bomb in a restaurant in northern Syria, one frequented by Syrian soldiers. The bomb killed dozens. The American suicide bomber was with al-Nusrah Front—an al-Qa'ida affiliate—and the group posted a video of the attack online.

Finally, over the past two weeks, an ISIL terrorist—probably of British origin—executed two American journalists, who were taken hostage while covering the plight of the Syrian people. ISIL then posted these images for the world to see.

Let me pause here and echo the words of the President this morning. On behalf of everyone at NCTC, our prayers are with the families of Steven Sotloff and James Foley today.

Taken together, these horrific acts of violence highlight why security and intelligence officials in the United States, across Europe, and around the world are alarmed about the rise of ISIL and the terrorism threats emanating from Syria and Iraq—threats to both those in the region and to the West.

Last week and again this morning, the President spoke directly these concerns, calling ISIL an “immediate threat to the people of Iraq and people throughout the region.” Likewise, the British Prime Minister announced that the UK was raising their threat level, citing information that ISIL is targeting Europe.

So, this morning, I would like to spend a few minutes talking about the nature of the terrorism threat we see in Syria and Iraq. I will talk about the rise of ISIL and some of the challenges we face, but also why ISIL is far from invincible.



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I will discuss how the situation in Syria and Iraq fits into the overall terrorism landscape, as I try to place this into a broader context.

Finally, I will touch on some of the steps we're taking to confront ISIL and other groups operating in Syria to address the threats they pose to our security.

Before I begin, let me thank Bruce and the Brookings Institution for inviting me here to speak and also to acknowledge the terrific work that Brookings does on the full range of terrorism and intelligence issues. There's a natural connection between NCTC and Brookings, given our role at NCTC as the primary government organization for all-source analysis of terrorism information. Indeed, we've sent some of our best and brightest here to serve as fellows.

As the Director of NCTC, I believe that our role includes talking to groups like this about our analysis and sharing our insights. This summer, the 9/11 Commissioners released their most recent report and asked national security leaders to "communicate to the public—in specific terms—what the threat is, and how it is evolving." I see this event as an opportunity to do this and to shed some measure of light on the current discourse concerning ISIL.

[Read Director Olsen's Full Remarks](#)